

TESTIMONY

of

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Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, and Committee Members,

Thank you for convening this hearing on Local and Private Sector Initiatives to Combat International Human Trafficking and for inviting a diverse group of stakeholders from the anti-trafficking field to share our work with you.

My name is Bradley Myles, and I am the Executive Director and CEO of Polaris Project, a non-profit organization headquartered in Washington, DC and dedicated to combatting human trafficking and modern-day slavery. Polaris Project was founded in 2002, and we are named after the North Star, “Polaris,” that guided slaves to freedom along the Underground Railroad. In our first 10 years of operations, Polaris Project’s direct victim services programs have served more than 500 survivors of human trafficking; our policy advocacy program has been involved in the passage of multiple federal bills and nearly 100 state bills on human trafficking; our training and technical assistance programs have offered training to nearly 100,000 stakeholders and community members; and through our operation of the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) hotline, we have fielded over 75,000 calls, and played a role in identifying nearly 9,000 survivors of trafficking to date. We focus on all forms and all types of human trafficking including men and women, adults and children, sex trafficking and labor trafficking, and immigrant and U.S. citizen victims.

In my testimony today, I plan to focus primarily on one area of Polaris Project’s comprehensive approach: anti-trafficking hotlines and the powerful role that hotlines play as a critical part of an effective anti-trafficking response in any country. I will share lessons learned from our work that began with operating local community-based hotlines in communities such as Washington, DC, and Newark, NJ, which then led to our work operating our country’s central human trafficking hotline over the past five years. Beginning in 2012, our ten year anniversary, we launched our future global vision for expanding the scope of our work in the area of hotlines because we believe that investing in hotlines can play a transformative role in the future of the global anti-trafficking movement.

The Persistent Challenge of Victim Identification

Despite years of tangible progress in the global fight against human trafficking, many challenges remain that are ripe for intervention, innovation, and progress. Victim identification is one major challenge that warrants increased and urgent attention. Put simply, trafficking victims are not being identified and connected with services at fast enough rates, in the United States and in countries throughout the world. In 2012, the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated that there are nearly 21 million people held in forms of forced labor and modern slavery worldwide. That same year, the June 2012 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report estimated that only 41,210 trafficking victims were identified in 2011. Based on these two estimates, we can conclude that as an anti-trafficking field, our collective victim identification rates are not yet even at 1 percent of the total people held in modern slavery. As one of the most pressing human rights issues facing our world today, we cannot accept the status quo of these low victim identification rates.

One of the common problems most often faced by a trafficking victim in trying to escape their situation is that they don't know whom to call or where to get help. Our experience has shown that well-run and well-publicized anti-trafficking hotlines can reach survivors and play a major role in increasing victim identification.

Piloting Local Trafficking Hotlines

Polaris Project first piloted operating anti-trafficking hotlines through our local victim services teams in Washington, DC and New Jersey. From 2003 through 2006, we operated local cell phone hotlines for trafficking survivors to call. These hotlines were operated by individual staff members and volunteers who were willing to be on-call 24/7 to answer hotline calls as they came in. As community partners and law enforcement began to distribute our local hotline numbers to survivors and other at-risk populations, we saw first-hand how promoting the number led to a spike in the numbers of trafficking victims that called us seeking services. We began to see how marketing the number led to new victims being found. I'll never forget the night that we received a call from two underage girls who were being forced by a pimp into the commercial sex trade in Washington, DC. The girls were from the Midwest, and a pimp had lured them to DC through a mix of manipulation, lies, and false promises. We first met these two girls through a phone call. They had only been in DC for a few days. A local DC police officer had seen the girls the day before, had a gut instinct that something was wrong, and gave them Polaris' local hotline number to call. That next day, when their pimp was asleep in the hotel room, the girls hid in the bathroom with the water running and whispered into the phone as they called the number for help. Without that phone call, we would have never known where these two girls were, or what they were going through, or who their trafficker was. Yet, the hotline number became a lifeline, and it was the bridge that connected them to us. Thanks to that hotline call, we were able to mobilize a response with law enforcement that night to get those two girls away from that pimp and connect them to our services. They're both now back in their home state and doing well.

But there were dozens of other cases like this one, and time and time again, the calls and tips came in through the local hotline. As patterns and trends began to emerge, and case after case occurred, we learned lots of early lessons from our pilot efforts with local hotlines. These include:

- 1) Hotlines ideally need to be 24/7 because you can't predict what hours of the day calls will come in.
- 2) We need to get hotline numbers into the hands of survivors and potential victims as much as possible so they know there's a number to call to get help. This will require new types of innovative marketing to reach hidden, transient, and marginalized populations.
- 3) We need to saturate the community with an awareness of what human trafficking is, how to spot it, and what number to call if you suspect you've encountered it.
- 4) Hotlines for survivors to call or text are lifelines to get people out of slavery and connect them to help. With universally available communications technologies and the massive spread of mobile devices all over the world, people are now "one phone call or text away from help" more than any other time in history. Simply put, well-run hotlines make a difference.

Operating the U.S. National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) Hotline

The insights we gained from our work with local hotlines sparked our interest to take on the challenge of operating hotlines nationally. In 2007, we were honored to be chosen by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to operate the country's central hotline on human trafficking, the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) at 1-888-373-7888. We began answering the national hotline on December 7, 2007, and we have been operating 24/7 without interruption since that day.

In operating the NHTRC, we aimed to apply the lessons we learned from our local hotlines and scale them nationally. Hundreds of different initiatives have been undertaken to promote the 1-888-373-7888 number to trafficking victims and other at-risk populations in the U.S., and as of today, I'm proud to report that over 3,500 trafficking survivors have called the national hotline directly to get help. One of the most successful hotline distribution initiatives we have seen is the Know Your Rights pamphlet produced by the U.S. Department of State. This has led to nearly 3,400 calls into the national hotline where the caller specifically indicated that they learned about the number through the pamphlet.

Hotlines also do not need to be boxed into the typical image of people answering a phone. We need to make sure that hotlines are offering as many types of communications channels as possible to maximize the number of survivor we reach. In the past five years, we've added new modes of communication such as email, online webforms, and social media.

In March 2013, we also just launched into a new partnership to add SMS texting to the national hotline as well. Thanks to the combined efforts of Polaris Project, THORN, Salesforce.com, and Twilio, we recently launched BeFree (233733), so that people can now connect to the NHTRC hotline through text functionality. This new texting initiative has received over 130 text conversations in its first few weeks of operation.

More than five years after beginning work on the NHTRC hotline in 2007, we're continuing to work towards a series of important outcomes, such as asking – are more victims being identified? Are more survivors getting connected with services? Are more survivors learning that there's a number they can call to get help? As of March 2013, the national hotline had learned of nearly 9,000 survivors of trafficking and has reported 3,235 cases of human trafficking to law enforcement. We've also been able to partner with thousands of other non-profits, community-based organizations, service providers, and law enforcement to work through the national hotline as a conduit to increase levels of coordination and cohesion in the field.

We learn new lessons from our work on the national hotline every day, and they enrich our initial understanding of hotlines from our earlier local hotlines work. Some of the key lessons include:

- 5) Hotlines concretely increase victim identification rates on a national scale.

- 6) Hotlines provide opportunities for millions more community members to participate in the anti-trafficking field because they can help with the effort to promote the hotline number or they can be the “eyes and ears” and look out for opportunities to call.
- 7) Hotlines cannot be run like an island. Quite the contrary, hotlines need to have a deep and wide network of referral relationships and partnerships that leverage the strengths of local actors in the field.

Hotlines and the Importance of Data

In addition to the role of hotlines in victim identification and connecting survivors with services, it is important to also understand that hotlines are robust sources of valuable data about human trafficking and the behaviors of traffickers. In the U.S., we have received nearly 7,000 tips on the national hotline with either high or moderate levels of indicators of human trafficking. Each one of these tips contains highly relevant information about understanding the behavior of traffickers and how they exploit their victims. Hotlines therefore are in a unique position to gain strategic insights about effective interventions because hotlines often receive thousands of calls with information about where trafficking is happening and to whom. By adding in a data analysis component, hotlines can identify the newest trends and patterns and then communicate those to the most relevant actors in the field who can use this information to fight the crime.

Dating back to 2007, Polaris Project built our call tracking system for the national hotline using Salesforce.com. Each time a call, email, webform, or text comes in, we create a new unique “case” record in Salesforce. After years of operating the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) hotline, we now have a database of over 75,000 records. As our data tracking systems matured over the years, we also began to build customized reports and dashboards to help us understand the data at our fingertips at a deeper level. We are also extremely grateful to have recently partnered with Palantir Technologies to further expand our data analysis effort for the U.S. hotline.

New Initiatives to Support Anti-Trafficking Hotlines Globally

In recent years, as we continued to operate the U.S. national anti-trafficking hotline, we’ve had opportunities to interface with hotlines in other countries. We’ve received hotline calls from 104 countries into the NHTRC, and we’ve also worked on dozens of transnational cases that led us to develop deeper relationships with actors outside the United States. Our experiences learning about anti-trafficking hotlines in other countries led to new ideas for strategies on how to improve the ecosystem of hotlines globally. The more we connected with other counterparts, the more we realized that hotlines are ripe for coordination and hold significant potential to bring about dramatic change and improvement in the global fight against trafficking.

The lessons we learned so far from interfacing with hotlines in other countries include:

- 8) Right now, anti-trafficking hotlines in countries all over the world are essentially ‘hidden gems’, under-resourced, under-publicized, and not fully maximizing their potential impact as lifesavers for victims of trafficking.

- 9) Hotlines are also not coordinating with each other across borders. Instead, they are often operating in isolation, and they frequently have low visibility and limited penetration in the public's eye.
- 10) Hotlines around the world are often operating with nonexistent or outdated technologies, including hard-copy call tracking systems.

In 2012, in conjunction with our 10 year anniversary celebration, Polaris Project launched our new global programming with generous funding from the U.S. Department of State, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, as well as essential in-kind support from Palantir Technologies and Salesforce.com.

Through a forward-looking TIP Office grant, Polaris Project's Global Hotlines Program aims to: 1) Map and identify all existing anti-trafficking hotlines worldwide; 2) Connect with as many individual hotlines as possible to foster mutual peer-to-peer learning and share best practices; and, 3) Offer training and technical assistance to support the creation and expansion of anti-trafficking hotlines in target countries. In the early months of this program, we have already identified and begun to contact over 70 anti-trafficking hotlines around the world, and we have engaged at a deeper level with hotlines in Malaysia, Greece, Turkey, Mongolia, Mexico, Moldova, Bulgaria, and the Ukraine. Efforts on these three fronts will be ongoing through at least 2015.

The Global Human Trafficking Hotline Network (GHTHN)

In April 2013, we took an additional step that builds on our five years of work operating the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) hotline for the United States and our recent State Department funded work mapping, connecting with, and supporting individual anti-trafficking hotlines around the world. We recently joined with Liberty Asia and La Strada International to found a new network of anti-trafficking hotlines across the U.S., Europe and Asia that makes the fight against human trafficking a more collective and data-driven effort. By sharing information between hotlines on a more global scale, we can work towards a global response network that can activate faster, more coordinated, and more effective responses.

This initiative, entitled the Global Human Trafficking Hotline Network, recently received a Global Impact Award from Google and engineering support from Google Ideas, Palantir Technologies, and Salesforce.com. Google's Global Impact Awards support entrepreneurial nonprofits using technology to change the world. Through the GHTHN, we'll work to share best practices amongst experts and craft new anti-trafficking strategies informed by our data and focused on eradication, prevention, and protection. We'll also build a broader safety net for survivors of modern-day slavery and develop a more coordinated global response for victims of this transnational crime.

Those of us that fight human trafficking need to be smarter and more sophisticated than the other side. Our initial efforts to map hotlines have taught us that there are dozens of hotlines around the world that are working in isolation to connect survivors to resources. By working together and sharing data and information, we can use technology to uncover strategic insights about how

and where trafficking is occurring, offer even better resources to vulnerable communities, support safe migration, and ultimately, reach more survivors. Working together will also build community and trust amongst hotline operators and will help to organize the broader ecosystem.

Raising the Bar

As a field, we cannot accept the status quo of identifying less than 1 percent of victims of human trafficking worldwide each year. We must increase victim identification rates, and one way we can do it is through the nexus between the rapid spread of mobile devices around the world and the existence of well-networked and well-publicized anti-trafficking hotlines for people to call.

At their fullest potential, all “next generation” anti-trafficking hotlines should increasingly communicate through multiple channels, including phone, email, online forms, social media, and texting. These anti-trafficking hotlines need to have extensive referral relationships with the existing infrastructure of services and law enforcement in their local, regional, or national area. With modest upgrades in universally available technology, hotlines can also build better cloud-based call tracking and data analysis systems. This is the new standard that we can aim for with as many hotlines as possible around the world. Through this network, we can also work towards the goal of anti-trafficking hotline coverage for every part of the world.

Furthermore, by engaging in data sharing and mutual learning, the GHTHN will also enable those in the field to map trafficking networks and understand how they operate -- and how they can be permanently disrupted.

Imagine what our global anti-trafficking effort could feel like if there were a powerful, effective, multi-modal, well-publicized and well-resourced “next generation” anti-trafficking hotline in every country or region of the world, and those hotlines were integrated, sharing data, leveraging new technologies, and coordinating more with each other and with myriad local law enforcement and service respondents. This global safety net will not only make it easier for the millions of people held in slavery to reach out to a hotline and access help, but it will also ensure that the first responders in the field are more prepared for that call when it comes in. Shared data and a powerful global data analysis initiative involving hotline call data will be critical to understanding the global footprint of human trafficking and driving new strategic interventions aimed at reducing and eradicating the crime.

Thank you again for this opportunity to speak before you all today and share about our work.